



Washington Ornithological Society

WOSNews # 168 Aug. - Sept. 2017

From the Board: Time for a New Slate of WOS Officers and Board Members

Jim Danzenbaker

Hi all! It's difficult to believe that we have, once again, reached the time to elect a new slate of Officers and Board members. The current Board and Officers have accomplished a lot over the last year and my hat's off to them for their undying dedication and support to WOS and the WOS membership. However, as we look toward the future, we need to elect new members whose vision and guidance will take us through the next year. Nominees: Cindy McCormack has stepped up to take on the reins of President and Eric Dudley will be next year's Vice-President.

I greatly appreciate their volunteer spirit and willingness to take on these integral roles. Our three-term Treasurer, Barbara Webster, is stepping aside and Kathy Slettebak will be our new Treasurer. Tom Bancroft will officially take on the role of Secretary. Current board member Ed Swan would like to "sign up" for a second two year term joining two other board members (Elaine Chuang and Faye McAdams-Hands) who are starting the second year of their two year terms. Kevin Black from Clark County is a new nominee for a Board position and we're excited about what he can bring to the organization.



Kevin Black is running for a spot on the WOS Board

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The WOS Board Could Use You

Jim Danzenbaker and Cindy McCormack

Are you potentially interested in joining the WOS Board of Directors? One of our board members recently resigned so there is an immediate opening on the board. If you want to have an integral hand in shaping the future of WOS, this is a great

opportunity! Responsibilities of being a board member include: 1.) attending board meetings (either in person or via GoToMeeting or other remote attendance application). These can happen

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American Coot, Marc Hoffman photo

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The Washington Ornithological Society was chartered in 1988 to increase knowledge of the birds of Washington and to enhance communication among all persons interested in those birds. WOS is a nonprofit educational organization under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code.

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You can join WOS meetings remotely, using your smartphone, laptop or other device, with GoToMeeting

WOS members, especially those who do not live in the Seattle area, have a way to join monthly meetings – virtually, via computer, smartphone or tablet using the videoconferencing program, GoToMeeting (GTM). Please consider trying it no matter where you live, as a benefit of WOS membership. Watch for a date-specific email from WOS before each meeting, October through June.

WOS Monthly Meeting, [date]
Mon, [date] 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM PDT

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.
JOIN (<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/xxxxxxx>)

You can also dial in using your phone.
United States +1 (846) 749-3112

Access Code: xxx-xxx-xxx

First GoToMeeting? Try a test session: <http://help.citrix.com/getready>

A New Slate of Officers and Board Members (continued)

Since these proposed new WOS Officers and Board Members are elected by you, the membership, I hope you will take the time to read their bios (below) and give them your encouragement. Online voting will open during the second half of September and will be posted on the WOS website in mid-September. An announcement will be made via the WOS list serve giving you information on how to vote and the voting time frame. Thanks in advance for casting your votes for these highly qualified individuals.

Cindy McCormack, President

WOS Vice President Cindy McCormack was elected as a director in 2015, but was later appointed to the vacant Vice President position. Cindy previously served two terms on the WOS board (2005-2008) and has assisted in WOS conference registration (2006-2013). Cindy is originally from Spokane, but currently lives in Vancouver and has spent some time



living in Pullman and Yakima. Birding started seriously for Cindy in college, and she ended up spending several years after graduating working for different agencies/contracts doing wildlife

research, specializing in bird surveys. Although her career is in veterinary hospital management, she has continued to volunteer and work on wildlife projects. She currently holds a federal bird banding permit and is a licensed veterinary technician (LVT). She has also volunteered for Spokane Audubon as board member, secretary, newsletter editor, and field trip leader.

Eric Dudley, Vice President

Eric Dudley joined the WOS board in the fall of 2015. He was raised in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, where his interest in nature and birds developed. He went to college in Ohio (Oberlin), majoring in Biology, attended veterinary school at Washington State (D.V.M., 1983),



practiced for seven years in Oregon, and then moved with his family to Washington in 1991. He's practiced small animal medicine and surgery in the North End of Tacoma since then.

Now that he's spending a bit less time at his practice, his interest in birding is expanding: he's enjoyed Ken W. Brown's Advanced Birding classes, often goes on the Wednesday morning Nisqually NWR bird walk with Phil Kelley, Shep Thorp and the group, participates in Audubon programs when possible, and is looking forward to contributing in various ways to WOS. He lives in Gig Harbor with his partner, Mary Kay.

Kathy Slettebak, Treasurer

I was living in a Cook County Forest Preserve farmhouse in Illinois when a Sparrow Hawk landed in the tree outside my kitchen window. It visited



nearly every day that summer. Seeing its bright colors and patterns up close, and watching the intensity of its hunt lured me into the world of birds.

After moving to Seattle in 1972 and "discovering" Discovery Park, my birding skills developed thanks to Seattle Parks-sponsored Saturday morning bird walks, field trips and classes through Seattle Audubon, WOS conferences and the Master Birder program.

Birding is always a part if not the sole purpose of travel. My local patch, though, is Discovery Park where I have been doing the monthly bird count for the south meadow since 2003, raised funds for the park's native plants with donations from eight annual Big Sits and participated in many CBCs. I enjoy introducing new and veteran birders to my favorite park by leading Seattle Parks and Seattle Audubon bird walks with my husband Arn.

Continued on next page

A New Slate of Officers and Board Members (continued)

My experience ground-truthing the South Sound Prairies chapter in the WOS “A Birder’s Guide to Washington” introduced me to an area rich with birds that was new to me. I hope to continue to explore new areas and learn more about the birds of Washington.

Tom Bancroft, Secretary

Tom Bancroft is excited to become the Secretary of WOS and becoming more involved with birding in Washington. He is on the board of Washington Audubon Society and previously served as Vice President of the Florida Ornithological Society. In Florida, he helped host one of their semi-annual meetings. Tom has also been a board member of the Wilson Ornithological Society and the Ornithological Council. Seattle is now his home where he is working on writing and photography. He is a member of Seattle Audubon and Washington Environmental Council, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and active in conservation issues.



For more than a decade, Tom worked on Everglades restoration issues for National Audubon Society and Archbold Biological Station before moving to Washington, DC. In D.C., he led the research department of The Wilderness Society for a decade and helped build conservation programs across the west and in Alaska. He then served as chief scientist for National Audubon Society for three years, helping them expand their conservation work across the Americas. During that time, Tom was appointed to a panel providing recommendations to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the placement of wind turbines relative to birds and bats. He has a Ph.D. from the University of South Florida with an emphasis on ornithology.

Tom hopes to build his bird list in Washington so that it catches up with his sightings from Florida and Pennsylvania.

His daughter lives in Australia, and he has birded extensively there and now has seen more birds in Queensland than in any other state in the world. He hopes to have his Washington list surpass his Queensland number soon.

Elaine Chuang, continuing Board Member

My jumping-off point into bird rapture wasn’t until my mid-twenties. I heard sweet song pouring forth somewhere out in the Texas Hill Country - and there he was, an improbably dazzling little bird - a Painted Bunting, sitting before me! I was hooked!

Now I am an almost fully-retired ophthalmologist (with the University of Washington and Veterans’ Hospital), calling Seattle home since 1993. After many decades “living to work,”

I’ve now begun to devote time to engaging with and exploring the natural world, while enjoying and sharing many personal rewards. Through participation in a variety of surveys (Neighborhood Bird Project: Discovery Park, North Loop Trail forever!, Puget Sound Seabird Survey, Puget Sound Shorebird Survey, Wetland Secretive Bird Survey) and other educational venues and trips, I’ve become acquainted with so many remarkable, engaging, and generous bird teachers/gurus. I will continue to learn..... perhaps forever!

I am also grateful to have recently joined the Seattle Parks’ “Urban Nature Guide” Program (under Penny Rose, Anne Bentley and others) and greatly enjoy the opportunities we have to engage with the community, in particular youngsters. For the past two years, I’ve been an active volunteer at Woodland Park Zoo, and I am also helping out at Seattle Audubon.

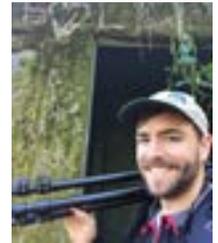
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A New Slate of Officers and Board Members (continued)

I will be bringing enthusiasm and devotion to the WOS Board while continuing to increase my birding knowledge and experience.

Kevin Black, incoming Board Member

Kevin's passion for birds began in 2008 when he was introduced to recording bird species for a community college biology class assignment. After graduating from Walla Walla University with his Master Degree in Social Work, Kevin moved to the Tri-Cities. Kevin became more active and aware of bird conservation when he joined the Lower Columbia Audubon Society (LCBAS). In 2014, Kevin became more involved in LCBAS by becoming Special Committee Membership Chair. While living in the Tri-Cities, Kevin also helped Christi Norman (Washington Audubon Program Director) engineer the structure of the first pilot Sagebrush Songbird Survey. Kevin created the curriculum and instructed eBird and Bird Identification Classes for the Sagebrush Songbird Survey. Kevin has also led field trips for WOS conferences. He enjoys the challenges of bird identification and county listing.



Kevin currently works at the Portland Veteran's Affairs Medical Center as a drug and alcohol counselor. Kevin grew up in Cowlitz County and currently resides in Vancouver, WA with his Wife. Kevin is also an active worship leader for his church. Along with his passion for birds, his hobbies include playing guitar, learning to play drums and gardening.

Ed Swan, renewing Board Member

Ed Swan is a year into his first term on the board. Ed is a nature writer and avid birder recently moved to West Seattle. Ed is author of *The Birds of Vashon Island: A Natural History of Habitat Transformation*, now in its second edition.

He is a Master Birder who has led field trips for Audubon Society chapters for over 20 years and is a former president for the Vashon-Maury Island Audubon Society. Ed currently guides private birding tours on Vashon Island and other destinations throughout the Puget Sound.



Faye McAdams-Hands, continuing Board member

My name is Faye McAdams Hands and I am an avid birder that has been a member of WOS for many years, attending many of the Annual Conferences. I also am a member of Tahoma Audubon in Tacoma/Pierce County and have been a past Fieldtrip Chairperson, and am the current Christmas Bird Count Coordinator for this chapter's Count Circle (since 1999). Additionally, I am a member of the American Birding Association. I enjoy submitting and perusing sightings on eBird locally, and when traveling. And I LOVE to travel! I am also a contact person for BirdingPals, and have both enjoyed their connections in foreign countries, as well as having been contacted by traveling birders seeking some guiding assistance in Washington. I am also a charter member of the Washington based Willettes – a group of like-minded lady birders that enjoy each other's company and birding adventures. I am recently retired from my sequential careers as first, a Flight Attendant, and later,

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New Slate of Officers and Board Members (continued)

a Psychiatric Social Worker. I live in Belfair, where I co-lead (with John Riegsecker) bi-monthly walks at Theler Wetlands on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month. My awesome husband Wade is a Professor of Economics at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. We have two Labrador Retrievers that share our home.

Patrick and Ruth Sullivan Memorial Bench Dedication to be held at Bottle Beach on Sunday, August 6

Jim Danzenbaker

There will be a dedication of the Patrick and Ruth Sullivan Memorial Bench at Bottle Beach State Park, Grays Harbor County, on August 6 at 11a.m. If you have birded Bottle Beach before, you may have seen the Patrick Sullivan Memorial bench that is at the corner of the entrance boardwalk and the paved pathway to the beach.

With the passing of Ruth in 2016, Bob Morse and Carol Riddell worked with the Washington Parks Department to modify the plaque on the bench to include Ruth, since Patrick and Ruth birded so much together during their years of birding in Washington and supporting the state's birding community.



Ruth Sullivan and Patrick Sullivan

Longtime WOS members Patrick and Ruth Sullivan were avid birders who spent an enormous amount of time in the field together looking at birds. They found many interesting species which they reported to the birding community so others could see and appreciate these birds.

The difference between Ruth and Patrick and other birders who found interesting birds was that they did not just report the bird and move on. Instead, they worked hard to show the new bird to other interested people. Many of their sightings were made at Bottle Beach State Park.



Left to right: Diane Yorgason-Quinn, Ruth Sullivan, Patrick Sullivan, Faye McAdams Hands, Bryan Hanson.

After the dedication, it's only a five-minute walk to the beach where we'll set up and study the shorebirds that congregate there during the incoming tide.

Looking forward to seeing you at Bottle Beach!

2017 WOS Conference Registration

Eric Dudley

Conference registration is open. It closes at 11:59 p.m. on August 22, 2017
Follow this link to the registration website: Fees are listed below.

<http://www.planetreg.com/E1031115713147440>

Registration fee	\$65
Student fee	\$35
Banquet Dinner fee	\$45
Each Field Trip fee	\$10
Boundary Bay/Reifel Field Trip fee	\$45
Individual Membership fee	\$25
Family Membership fee	\$30
Student Membership fee	\$15

*Please
Join Us!*

We hope you can join us at Semiahmoo Sept. 21-25! At this time (late July) about 70 birders have registered, quite a few more are expected to do so, and plenty of field trip opportunities are still available for any procrastinators out there! In addition to field trips, our Friday evening social time and “Stump the Experts/Chumps,” moderated by Dennis Paulson, is sure to be lots of fun. And our Saturday banquet, with an after-dinner presentation by James Gaydos of the SeaDoc Society, should be very informative. Please join us, and enjoy birding in Whatcom and Skagit Counties in the company of many friends.



Kathy Hartman photo

Championing Union Bay: A Quest for Harmony Between People and Nature

Kathy Hartman

According to Larry Hubbell, birds and wildlife are far more interesting than he is. But for an uninteresting guy, he's got a lot going on.

On a warm Seattle day, he makes his way through the Washington Park Arboretum to check on a Northern Flicker nest he monitors. He saw two juveniles there a couple of days earlier, and he wants to see if they've fledged. Larry walks these trails, and those at the Montlake Fill across Union Bay, for a few hours almost daily, observing and monitoring birds and wildlife — all with a goal.

As author and photographer for his blog, Union Bay Watch, he has a mission, which is “to promote the appreciation of wildlife and increase harmony between humanity and nature.” He uses his blog as a tool to educate people about urban wildlife, and the connections between the wildlife and the environment we all live in. And the work he does observing birds and monitoring nests — eagles, ospreys, Pileated woodpeckers, and others — is front and center in his blog. He studies these birds as they go about their daily lives and really gets to know them.

“My goal is to honestly try to get to know as many birds as possible as individuals, not as species, but as the creature,” says Larry, who is now retired. “And also to introduce other people to those same birds as much as possible and to create the sense that we're all living here together.”

Union Bay is flanked by the Arboretum to the south, and the Montlake Fill (also called the Union Bay Natural Area) to the north. These natural area gems are right in the heart of Seattle — great examples of people and wildlife living side by side. They're the perfect places to pursue his mission, and all within walking distance of his house.

The Surveyors

is an occasional series profiling birders who consistently return to favorite sites in Washington state to survey birds and wildlife



Growing up in Oregon, he spent a lot of time outdoors with his uncle, which is where his interest in nature started. His love for birds developed later. Long-time friend and birder Marcus Roening had been trying to get him interested for years, but Larry says he felt a bit overwhelmed by the number of birds there were, so he decided to stick to learning the native trees of Washington instead. There are only a couple dozen of those.

Eventually his interest in birds grew, and he started the blog. But there was one event that really ignited his fascination and excitement about the birds in the area.

Eddie the eagle used to perch on the light posts over the 520 bridge, and was a familiar and much-loved sight for many commuters. But in August 2011, Eddie was hit and killed by a bus as he flew over

the bridge. It was a big deal in Seattle. Many mourned his loss.

“At about the same time I learned where the nest was, and started watching it,” Larry recalls. “Within about a month, the female took a new mate, so then I watched it all the way through the end of the year until there were new young in the nest.”

Eagles do tend to sink their talons into things, and

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Kathy Hartman photos

Championing Union Bay (continued)

Larry was no exception. He was hooked. “It was the big moment where I got more of a long-term interest in a particular bird.”

The following June he wrote *Life After Eddie* <<http://unionbaywatch.blogspot.com/2012/06/life-after-eddie.html>>, a blog post that got picked up by The Seattle Times and other publications across the country. The story of Eddie and how the female’s life went on after he was gone brought Larry a loyal following.

He became more focused on writing blog posts and seeing birds, thinking all the while about how to accomplish his mission. To him, observing nature is a critical first step. “If we don’t pay attention to what’s going on around us, we have no chance of existing in harmony.”

He pulls out a little book he created with his bird photos, opening it to images of Dark-eyed Juncos. He uses it to educate people not just about the birds, but about the connections between the species and the environment.

He flips through as he speaks. “When I’m out with someone, I can say here’s what a Dark-eyed Junco looks like, then show a male gathering food to feed



to a young one, and here’s a female. I can then show them how to recognize the junco when it flies away because of the white on the outside of the tail feathers, and what the eggs in the nest look like, and that

they’re ground nesting birds, so they’re very apt to be disturbed by off-leash dogs or other predatory creatures.”

And making this connection between ground-nesting birds and the damage off-leash dogs can do is something he’s trying to pass on. “From Earth Day to Independence Day, I think off-leash dog fines should be tripled because that’s the time when all kinds of creatures are reproducing and they’re very apt to be disturbed.”

But he’s definitely not against dogs. He takes his daughter’s dog, Ginger, with him all the time. “She’s probably been with me for 99.9 % of all the photos I’ve ever taken,” he says. “I’ve been trying to teach her hand signals so when we’re watching the birds’ nests, I can ask her to sit without making any noise.”

Larry’s friend Marcus had also encouraged him for a while to take the Seattle Audubon Master Birder program, and after retiring last year, he decided to finally do it.

“Dennis Paulson [primary instructor for the program] is very much a naturalist, and that’s one of the big advantages of the class,” Larry says. “Even though he’s teaching about birds, he’s interested in life. And that’s a huge plus, and his knowledge is just fantastic and so in depth.”

Larry’s more interested in observing and learning about behavior than listing. “I don’t consider myself a classical big year kind of birder. I don’t make a list of all the birds I’ve seen.”

And his blog is not just about the photography, he says. “I have friends who are better photographers. I have friends who are better bloggers and writers. I have friends who are better birders.” He laughs.

“But what I do is not about being the best at any one of those things. It’s just about trying to accomplish my mission.”

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Championing Union Bay (continued)

At the Montlake Fill, Larry sets up his camera and tripod to photograph the Ospreys on the nest. The female, who Larry named Lacey, is on the nest most of the time, and Chester, the male, periodically drops a fish off, then flies to a nearby tree to stand guard against the local eagles. There are also two red-eyed chicks who occasionally pop their heads up, much to everyone's delight. They looked like dinosaurs (the chicks, not the people).

And for a guy who's not that interesting, people sure want to talk to him. Every few minutes, someone stops by to chat with Larry. Some are birders, but some are just people from the community out for a morning walk. Everyone seems to know him, and many ask questions.

"Hey Larry, have the chicks hatched yet?"

"Larry, how many chicks are there?"

"Have you seen them yet today?"

And...

"HEY LARRY, there's a Common Yellowthroat over here!" Larry smiles and jogs over to see.

He's easygoing and has time for everyone – one of those people who's so genuinely nice that it's almost a little disturbing. But not interesting, of course.

At the Fill in coming days, people bring up Larry even when he isn't there. One woman asks, "Do you know Larry? He said there was a third Osprey that landed right on their nest. He thinks maybe it's one of the young from last year. Otherwise, the parents would have chased it off."

In fact, by the Osprey nest in the early morning hours, the conversation always seems to come back to four things: Ospreys, photography, the need for coffee, and Larry and stuff Larry says. Someone could probably set up an espresso stand there and sell Osprey mugs and I Heart Larry t-shirts and make a killing. Something to think about.

Ospreys and coffee aside, what's evident is that that the work Larry's doing, both with the blog posts and just being out in the community, is inspiring people

to learn, and to connect with nature.

When asked what people can do to help wildlife in the area, Larry has ready answers, as he's written several blog posts on the subject. He says one thing we can do is put up birdhouses in our yards and everywhere we can because we've cut down so many trees.

And when it comes to birds in your yard, Larry says to "think about things from nature's perspective." He says mowing your lawn attracts some birds, but excludes others, like those that eat the seeds off the grass.

"And when you clean the cobwebs around your house, you're getting rid of the spider webs that hummingbirds use to hold their nests together. If you get rid of the

"I would really like to communicate more about the web of life," he says. "I love the birds as the piece that attracts people's attention, that gets them interested, but it's the big picture that's really far more important than the individual along the way."

dead tree in your yard, you're getting rid of a potential home for Red-breasted nuthatches, woodpeckers, chickadees — a long list of birds and other creatures that like to live in those cavities."

A newer thing on his blog is a piece at the end of each post called Going Native, often focusing on native, and non-native, plants. He says it's important to plant native plants "instead of the ones that might look prettier to our eyes." Native plants attract the native birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

"I would really like to communicate more about the web of life," he says. "I love the birds as the piece that attracts people's attention, that gets them interested, but it's the big picture that's really far more important than the individual along the way."

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Championing Union Bay (continued)

He also encourages people to get out to a park and sit for 15 minutes, “just observing, quietly observing. You see so much more that way.”

“Another one would be —” he stops, and we both start laughing — a lot. It’s a brilliant, sunlit afternoon, and a guy is walking by talking loudly on his cell phone, staring at the ground. “When you’re outside in a park or in nature, unplug,” Larry says. “Unplug.”

But one of the threads that runs through the work he does — the blog posts, the monitoring, the work he does in the community — is his great concern for wildlife and the environment, and what might happen down the road.

“We have to keep raising the next generation with better tools, and giving them better skills at interacting with each other, at solving problems,” he says. “I feel like my daughter is doing that. She’s already ahead of me, and now she’s dragging me along, teaching me things.

“There’s this whole other untapped part of our society, which is what I’m trying to reach with the blog. People who are kind of interested ... and might even have some time or money or willingness to help. But you’ve got to reach them, and that’s what I’m attempting to do with the blog. To reach out and get those people, the people who are inclined to be helpful, but don’t really know what to do next.”

He acknowledges that not everyone understands or cares about environmental issues, but says “it’s not even critical that everybody gets it. If we get a solid minority that really believes in things, we can change things. All looking in the same direction, and moving it forward. Then we can make a difference. If that happens, then in future generations, it will become a majority.”

The WOS Board Could Use You (continued)

between 3-6 times a year depending on what the current president would like to do and the projects that are underway. We currently meet at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma.

2.) participating in online discussions of pertinent topics which can be wide ranging and sometimes quite intricate.

3.) being part of the team that plans and completes the annual WOS conference.

4.) providing feedback on continuing publications and meetings including the WOS newsletter, Washington Birds (eventually), and the monthly member meetings held on the first Monday of each month in Seattle.

Our current Board members are: Elaine Chuang, Ed Swan, Faye McAdams-Hands, and Eric Dudley. Board terms are for two years and start October 1.

If you feel that this interests you or if you need any additional information, please contact Cindy McCormack, any of the current board members or me and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Thanks for your time and consideration!



Revisions to the Washington State Checklist (based on 2017 American Ornithological Society Checklist Update)

Matt Bartels, Secretary,
Washington Bird Records
Committee

Quick: What's the final bird on the Washington state list? If this question came a little over a year ago, the familiar answer would have been House Sparrow. Then, last year, with the AOU checklist changes, House Sparrow moved up in the sequence and Scott's Oriole was our new 'final' species. And now, with the latest reordering of the checklist sequence, the new correct answer is Dickcissel.

Such is the life for birders who keep an eye on their checklists to learn the latest and best understanding of how the birds of the world are related to each other. Every year, the American Ornithological Society's North American Classification Committee reviews and votes on proposals for changes to the checklist, releasing their newest decisions in the summer. Last year's checklist supplement was focused on big changes to the sequence at the Order level (See [WOS News #164](#) for notes on that update). The latest update, though less radical than last year's in many ways, still includes a number of changes that will affect the Washington state checklist. This article attempts to lay out the changes and some of the reasoning behind them from a lay-person's perspective.

Before diving into some of the more mundane sequence and naming revisions, a couple big changes to start things off:

The biggest change directly affecting our list is the decision to lump Thayer's Gull in with Iceland Gull. Thayer's Gull was originally split off from Herring

Gull in 1973, but there has long been doubt about where or whether to draw the line between Thayer's and Iceland. The latest update ruled that the evidence for maintaining Thayer's as a separate species is not convincing – the original study on which the distinction was based has been called into question, and no subsequent studies have shown a clear dividing line between Thayer's Gulls and the *kumlieni* subspecies of Iceland Gull. As a result, we no longer have both species on the Washington state list, and instead will refer to them all as Iceland Gull.

One more species change worth mentioning, although



Jody Wells photo

Thayer's Gull looking back to the past when it was a stand-alone species

not in Washington or likely to ever be found here: There's a new crossbill species nearby! The non-migratory population of crossbill found in the South Hills and Albion Mountains of south-central Idaho has been recognized as a species in its own right, the Cassia Crossbill. This doesn't affect our checklist, but given that it is just a ten-hour drive from Seattle to the location of this new species, I can imagine a number of

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Revisions to the Washington State Checklist (cont.)

Washington birders might be considering the option of a long weekend road-trip. For details on where to find them, Idaho Birds has put together a helpful page online: <https://idahobirds.net/birding-idaho/cassia-crossbill/>

Moving on to some of the revisions that will affect how our checklist is ordered now, here's a rundown of the differences spurred by the latest update:

Geese

The word of the day for the first two changes is 'paraphyletic.' All members of any given genus (or higher branch of taxonomy) are implied to have come from a common ancestor and should thus form what is called a 'monophyletic' (=single ancestor) group. When some species in one genus are found to be more closely related to species in a different genus than to those in their own, this violates the rule, and the group is considered 'paraphyletic.' To resolve this, the taxonomy has to be rearranged, either by grouping species more broadly, or by splitting species into smaller groupings. We have one of each solution in the first two adjustments to our checklist. First, the geese:

With this update, the genus *Chen* is lumped into *Anser*, in recognition that some *Anser* geese were more closely related to *Chen* geese than to other *Anser*. The result for us is that the three former *Chen* geese (Emperor, Snow and Ross's) are now all *Anser* geese (along with Greater White-fronted and Taiga Bean-Goose), and now sit at the beginning of the goose sequence near the top of the checklist.

Ducks

Moving in the other direction, the broad duck genus *Anas* was recognized to contain several groups better understood as multiple distinct genera (again, because some former *Anas* members were more closely related to other genera of ducks than to their fellow *Anas*). As such, what was *Anas* is now four different genera. In addition, the sequence of ducks is reordered to reflect a revised understanding of the timing of evolutionary splits as duck species emerged. After Wood Duck (still at the top of the

duck section), Baikal Teal receives its own genus, *Sibirionetta*, in recognition that a split between it and the other former-*Anas* ducks came earliest. Garganey, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal and Northern Shoveler are now in genus *Spatula*. They are followed by Gadwall, Falcated Duck, and the wigeons in *Mareca*. And finally, *Anas* is retained as the genus for our Mallard, Northern Pintail and Green-winged Teal.

Shorebirds

A few relatively small sequence shifts take place among the shorebirds, a group that has been radically reorganized in recent years. These changes amount to 'clean up' of some lingering issues and additional similar changes are possible in the coming years as our understanding of shorebirds evolves. This time around, the curlews and godwits are slightly shuffled within their respective genera, and the *Tringa* genus sees Lesser Yellowlegs and Willet moved up before Spotted Redshank, Greater Yellowlegs and Wood Sandpiper.

Gulls

As mentioned, the only change in the gull section is the lumping of Thayer's into Iceland Gull.

Raptors

Our Northern Harrier is recognized to be a separate species from the Eurasian Hen Harrier, a split long recognized elsewhere in the world. As a result of the split, our Harrier is now given a new species name: *Circus hudsonius*.

Shrike

In a very similar move, our Northern Shrike is recognized to be a separate species from the Eurasian Great Gray Shrike, and again we have a new scientific name for our part of the split: *Lanius borealis*.

Passerines

Things get more complicated as we move into the perching birds. Over the past several years, the sequence at the bottom half of the checklist has

Continued on next page

Revisions to the Washington State Checklist (cont.)

been in flux. New information from studies has prompted multiple revisions of how we understand the relationship between these families and how we order them on our checklist. The changes continue with this update.

Finch

Last year, the finch family was moved earlier in the checklist sequence to reflect its closer relationship to other old world groups. Now, we've got a bit of reorganization within the family at the genus level. As with the shorebirds, comments in the proposal note that this is an attempt to clean up after the many reorganizations over preceding years. A new sequence was derived by combining the results from multiple studies and applying rules that call for [a] listing older groups earlier in any sequence, and [b] placing the group with the fewest representatives first when ordering sister clades: Evening Grosbeak now follows Brambling near the top of the finch family, followed by Pine Grosbeak and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. Next come the *Haemorhous* trio of House, Purple and Cassin's Finch, the redpolls and the crossbills, and then the sequence concludes with the siskin and goldfinch.

Old World Buntings

The *Emberizidae* family has long included both Old World Buntings and our New World Sparrows. This update splits these groups into separate families, with the Old World Buntings (represented in Washington by Little and Rustic Buntings) retaining the family name *Emberizidae*. In addition, this family is now moved up in the sequence, conveniently just below the longspurs and Snow/McKay's Bunting, with whom they are often grouped in other parts of the world.

Sparrows

"Our" New World sparrows are no longer found after the warblers! They've been moved up in the sequence, right below the Old World Buntings and given their own family, *Passerellidae*. In addition, in huge news: a space was removed from the name of *Ammodramus leconteii*. No longer "Le Conte's Sparrow," the corrected name, "LeConte's Sparrow"

comes in recognition of the actual way John Lawrence LeConte spelled his name. As someone who has gotten this wrong multiple times before, I know now I'll never quite remember which way is correct....

Yellow-breasted Chat

It has long been believed that Yellow-breasted Chat did not fit well within the warbler grouping, but there was uncertainty about what to do with it. Well, in this new update it has received its own family *Icteriidae*, and been moved up and away from the other warblers, coming directly after the sparrows now and before the blackbirds. If you are someone who keeps track of how many bird families you have seen: Congratulations, you just gained a new family!

Blackbirds

The last big shift and reordering for our checklist comes in the *Icteridae* family (not to be confused with the Yellow-breasted Chat's new *Icteriidae* family name). First, the Icterids have been moved from the bottom of the list to a spot before warblers. Next the sequence within this family is reorganized based on recent genetic studies. In short, the *Icteridae* has been organized into seven subfamilies, of which five are represented in Washington. Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*Xanthocephalinae* subfamily) now come first within the sequence, indicating their early split from the other subfamilies. Bobolink (*Dolichonychinae*) and the meadowlarks (*Sturnellinae*) come next, followed by Orioles (*Icterinae*) and then blackbirds (*Agelaiinae*). The genera within this last subfamily are also reordered to leave us with a sequence of Red-winged and Tricolored Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, the Rusty and Brewer's Blackbird pair and finally Common and Great-tailed Grackle.

The sequence after the Icterids proceeds without any more shuffling or changes. Warblers come next followed by our *Piranga* Tanagers, *Pheucticus* Grosbeaks, *Passerina* buntings and at the end, our new 'last' species, Dickcissel.

Finally, a few changes that were proposed did not receive approval this year: Common and Hoary

Continued on next page

Revisions to the Washington State Checklist (cont.)

Redpolls are still considered separate species, pending further study of their breeding grounds. Yellow-rumped Warbler, Willet, Brown Creeper, Bell's Vireo and Nashville Warbler were all up for proposed splits. None of those splits were endorsed and thus at this point we retain our current species.

Stay tuned to see whether any of these possible splits are reconsidered in future years. Overall, though we may feel as if we've been subjected to a lot of volatility lately, I'd encourage fellow birders to embrace these shifts. Every change comes with interesting new studies and explanations to back it, and hopefully we are constantly improving our understanding of how the birds we enjoy are related to each other. A copy of the state checklist, changes marked in red, follows below.

(Read the AOS 58th Supplement here: <http://www.americanornithologypubs.org/doi/pdf/10.1642/AUK-17-72.1?code=coop-site>)

Dig into the proposals and voting comments here: http://checklist.aou.org/nacc/proposals/current_proposals.html)

Official Washington State Checklist of Birds

(updated by Washington Bird Records Committee, July 2017)

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (1905)	White-throated Swift	Parasitic Jaeger	Brown Booby	Willow Flycatcher	Redwing	Brown-headed Cowbird
Emperor Goose	Ruby-throated Hummingbird(s)	Long-tailed Jaeger	Brandt's Cormorant	Least Flycatcher	American Robin	Rusty Blackbird
Snow Goose	Black-chinned Hummingbird	Common Murre	Double-crested Cormorant	Hammond's Flycatcher	Varied Thrush	Brewer's Blackbird
Ross's Goose	Anna's Hummingbird	Thick-billed Murre	Red-faced Cormorant (s)	Gray Flycatcher	Gray Catbird	Common Grackle
Gr. White-fronted Goose	Costa's Hummingbird	Pigeon Guillemot	Pelagic Cormorant	Dusky Flycatcher	Brown Thrasher	Great-tailed Grackle
Taiga Bean-Goose	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	Long-billed Murrelet	American White Pelican	Pacific-slope Flycatcher	Sage Thrasher	Overbird
Brant	Rufous Hummingbird	Marbled Murrelet	Brown Pelican	Black Phoebe	Northern Mockingbird	Northern Waterthrush
Cackling Goose	Kittlitz's Murrelet (1894)	American Bittern	American Bittern	European Starling (l)	Golden-winged Warbler	Tennessee Warbler
Canada Goose	Calliope Hummingbird	Scripps's Murrelet	Great Blue Heron	Bohemian Waxwing	Blue-winged Warbler	Orange-crowned Warbler
Trumpeter Swan	Broad-billed Hummingbird	Guadalupe Murrelet	Great Egret	Cedar Waxwing	Black-and-white Warbler	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Tundra Swan	Yellow Rail	Ancient Murrelet	Snowy Egret	Phainopepla (s)	Prothonotary Warbler	MacGillivray's Warbler
Whooper Swan	Virginia Rail	Little Blue Heron	Little Blue Heron	Siberian Accentor	Tennessee Warbler	Mourning Warbler (s)
Wood Duck	Parakeet Auklet	Parakeet Auklet	Cattle Egret	House Sparrow (l)	Orange-crowned Warbler	Lucy's Warbler
Baikal Teal	American Coot	Least Auklet	Green Heron	Eastern Yellow Wagtail	Nashville Warbler	MacGillivray's Warbler
Garganey	Sandhill Crane	Whiskered Auklet (s)	Black-crowned Night-Heron	Gray Wagtail	Nashville Warbler	Mourning Warbler (s)
Blue-winged Teal	Black-necked Stilt	Rhinoceros Auklet	Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	White Wagtail	MacGillivray's Warbler	Kentucky Warbler (s)
Cinnamon Teal	American Avocet	Horned Puffin	White Ibis	Red-throated Pipit (s)	Mourning Warbler (s)	Common Yellowthroat
Northern Shoveler	Black Oystercatcher	Tufted Puffin	Glossy Ibis	American Pipit	Kentucky Warbler (s)	Common Yellowthroat
Gadwall	Black-bellied Plover	Black-legged Kittiwake	White-faced Ibis	Forke-tailed Flycatcher	Kentucky Warbler (s)	Common Yellowthroat
Falcated Duck	American Golden-Plover	Red-legged Kittiwake	Turkey Vulture	Loggerhead Shrike	Common Yellowthroat	Hooded Warbler
Eurasian Wigeon	Pacific Golden-Plover	Ivory Gull	Northern Shrike	White-eyed Vireo (s)	American Redstart	American Redstart
American Wigeon	Lesser Sand-Plover	Sabine's Gull	California Condor (s) (1897)	Bell's Vireo	Cape May Warbler	Cape May Warbler
Mallard	Snowy Plover	Bonaparte's Gull	Osprey	Hutton's Vireo	Northern Parula	Northern Parula
Northern Pintail	Wilson's Plover	Black-headed Gull	White-tailed Kite	Yellow-throated Vireo	Magnolia Warbler	Magnolia Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Common Ringed Plover (s)	Little Gull	Bald Eagle	Cassin's Vireo	Bay-breasted Warbler	Bay-breasted Warbler
Carnivorous Duck	Semipalmated Plover	Ross's Gull	Northern Harrier	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Blackburnian Warbler	Blackburnian Warbler
Redhead	Piping Plover	Cooper's Gull	Northern Harrier	Cooper's Hawk	Prairie Warbler	Prairie Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Killdeer	Franklin's Gull	Northern Goshawk	Ferruginous Hawk	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Tufted Duck	Mountain Plover	Black-tailed Gull	Red-shouldered Hawk	Northern Goshawk	Black-throated Blue Warbler	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Greater Scaup	Eurasian Dotterel	Heermann's Gull	Broad-winged Hawk	Broad-winged Hawk	Palm Warbler	Palm Warbler
Lesser Scaup	Upland Sandpiper	Mew Gull	Swinson's Hawk	Swinson's Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Steller's Eider	Bristle-thighed Curlew	Ring-billed Gull	Ring-billed Hawk	Ring-billed Hawk	Blackburnian Warbler	Blackburnian Warbler
King Eider	Whimbrel	Western Gull	Rough-legged Hawk	Rough-legged Hawk	Summer Tanager	Summer Tanager
Common Eider	Little Curlew (s)	California Gull	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Black-throated Gray Warbler	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Harlequin Duck	Long-billed Curlew	Herring Gull	Northern Goshawk	Northern Goshawk	Townsend's Warbler	Townsend's Warbler
Surf Scoter	Bar-tailed Godwit	Iceland Gull	Barn Owl	Barn Owl	Hermit Warbler	Hermit Warbler
White-winged Scoter	Hudsonian Godwit	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Flammulated Owl	Flammulated Owl	Black-throated Green Warbler	Black-throated Green Warbler
Black Scoter	Marbled Godwit	Slaty-backed Gull	Western Screech-Owl	Western Screech-Owl	Canada Warbler	Canada Warbler
Long-tailed Duck	Ruddy Turnstone	Glaucous-winged Gull	Great Horned Owl	Great Horned Owl	Wilson's Warbler	Wilson's Warbler
Bufflehead	Black Turnstone	Glaucous Gull	Snowy Owl	Snowy Owl	Summer Tanager	Summer Tanager
Common Goldeneye	Great-Knickerbacked Gull	Northern Hawk Owl	Northern Hawk Owl	Northern Hawk Owl	Western Tanager	Western Tanager
Barrow's Goldeneye	Red Knot	Least Tern	Northern Pygmy-Owl	Northern Pygmy-Owl	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Smew	Surfbird	Caspian Tern	Burrowing Owl	Burrowing Owl	Black-headed Grosbeak	Black-headed Grosbeak
Hooded Merganser	Ruff	Black Tern	Spotted Owl	Spotted Owl	Lazuli Bunting	Lazuli Bunting
Common Merganser	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Common Tern	Barred Owl	Barred Owl	Indigo Bunting	Indigo Bunting
Red-breasted Merganser	Still Sandpiper	Arctic Tern	Great Gray Owl	Great Gray Owl	Painted Bunting	Painted Bunting
Ruddy Duck	Curlew Sandpiper	Forster's Tern	Long-eared Owl	Long-eared Owl	Dickcissel	Dickcissel
Mountain Quail	Temminck's Stint	Elegant Tern	Boreal Owl	Boreal Owl		
Northern Bobwhite (l)	Red-necked Stint	Sanderling	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Northern Saw-whet Owl		
California Quail (l)	Chukar (l)	Dunlin	Belted Kingfisher	Belted Kingfisher		
Gray Partridge (l)	Gray Partridge (l)	Gray Sandpiper	Lewis's Woodpecker	Lewis's Woodpecker		
Ring-necked Pheasant (l)	Ring-necked Pheasant (l)	Baird's Sandpiper	Acorn Woodpecker	Acorn Woodpecker		
Ruffed Grouse	Little Stint	Least Sandpiper	Common Loon	Common Loon		
Greater Sage-Grouse	Least Sandpiper	White-rumped Sandpiper	Yellow-billed Loon	Yellow-billed Loon		
Spruce Grouse	White-rumped Sandpiper	White-capped Albatross	White-capped Albatross	White-capped Albatross		
White-tailed Ptarmigan	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Laysan Albatross	Laysan Albatross	Laysan Albatross		
Dusky Grouse	Pectoral Sandpiper	Black-footed Albatross	Red-naped Sapsucker	Red-naped Sapsucker		
Sooty Grouse	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Short-tailed Albatross	Red-breasted Sapsucker	Red-breasted Sapsucker		
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Western Sandpiper	Northern Fulmar	Downy Woodpecker	Downy Woodpecker		
Wild Turkey (l)	Short-billed Dowitcher	Providence Petrel	Hairy Woodpecker	Hairy Woodpecker		
Red-billed Grebe	Long-billed Dowitcher	Murphy's Petrel	White-headed Woodpecker	White-headed Woodpecker		
Horned Grebe	Jack Snipe (s)	Long-billed Dowitcher	Am. Three-toed Woodpecker	Am. Three-toed Woodpecker		
Red-necked Grebe	Wilson's Snipe	Hawaiian Petrel	Black-backed Woodpecker	Black-backed Woodpecker		
Eared Grebe	Spotted Sandpiper	Cook's Petrel	Northern Flicker	Northern Flicker		
Western Grebe	Western Sandpiper	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	Pileated Woodpecker	Pileated Woodpecker		
Clark's Grebe	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Buller's Shearwater	Crested Caracara	Crested Caracara		
Rock Pigeon (l)	Wandering Tattler	Short-tailed Shearwater	Eurasian Kestrel	Eurasian Kestrel		
Band-tailed Pigeon	Lesser Yellowlegs	Sooty Shearwater	American Kestrel	American Kestrel		
Eurasian Collared-Dove (l)	Willet	Great Shearwater	Merlin	Merlin		
White-winged Dove	Spotted Redshank (s)	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Eurasian Hobby	Eurasian Hobby		
Mourning Dove	Greater Yellowlegs	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Cyrfalcon	Cyrfalcon		
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Wood Sandpiper	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Peregrine Falcon	Peregrine Falcon		
Black-billed Cuckoo	Wilson's Phalarope	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Prairie Falcon	Prairie Falcon		
Common Nighthawk	Common Phalarope	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Olive-sided Flycatcher		
Common Poorwill	Black Swallow	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Greater Pewee (s)	Greater Pewee (s)		
Black Swallow	Pomarine Jaeger	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Western Wood-Pewee	Western Wood-Pewee		
Vaux's Swift		Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Eastern Wood-Pewee		
		Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Magnificent Frigatebird	Magnificent Frigatebird		
		Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Blue-footed Booby	Blue-footed Booby		
		Wilson's Storm-Petrel (s)	Alder Flycatcher	Alder Flycatcher		

KEY
(l) — Introduced species
(s) — Sight record
Italicized species are review spec.
Dates in parentheses indicate data last record.

Washington State Checklist:
516 species total, including 495 species fully accredited (supported t specimen, photograph, or recording) 21 species which are sight-only records (supported only by written documents)

For more information on the Washington Bird Records Commit see: <http://wos.org/records/>

WOS Field Trips

Jen Kunitsugu

WOS field trips are each open to a limited number of participants. WOS members may join up to four trips a year (excluding Annual Conference trips). Non-members may attend as a member's guest once per year. Questions about field trips should be directed to the trip leaders.

All of our WOS field trip leaders will now have a Field Trip Liability Release Form for participants to sign. This is a requirement to safeguard not only the participants but also the field trip leaders and WOS.

Grays Harbor area

Wednesday, September 6, 2017 – Limit 11

Leader: Brian H. Bell [425-485-8058](tel:425-485-8058) ([206-619-0379](tel:206-619-0379) morning of trip only)

The southbound shorebird migration should be in full swing by early September. We'll plan for a wide variety of shorebirds and will search out the best locations - but won't pass over other nice birds. We'll likely hit Bottle Beach, Westport and maybe Tokeland. Scopes essential, bring a Discover Pass if you have one. We'll meet at 6 a.m. at the Newport Hills P&R (exit 9 off I-405) and carpool to three cars, bring lunch and fluids, probably a jacket (can be chilly at the coast, but who knows?). To sign up: Call Brian ([425-485-8058](tel:425-485-8058) to make a reservation).

San Juan County

Saturday, September 9-Sunday, September 10, 2017

Leader: Matt Bartels

We'll catch the early ferry to Lopez Island and look for fall migrants including shorebirds, jaegers and passerines. After spending the night in Friday Harbor, we'll spend Sunday working our way around San Juan Island before catching the ferry back to Anacortes. Scopes necessary, as is patience and flexibility given the logistics of catching ferries. Limited to seven participants.

To sign up, email mattxyz@earthlink.net.

If you would like to lead a field trip or suggest a location for a field trip, send a note to Jen Kunitsugu, Field Trip Chair (FieldTrips@wos.org)

To Playback or Not? A Nest Full of Questions

Ethics of Playback in the Case of Northern Spotted Owls

Birders are generally conservation-minded people. They truly care about the animals they are interested in seeing and hearing. However, in their quest to observe as many species as possible, some birders are using tools that can be harmful to the birds they are trying to find. In particular, the use of tapes, MP3s and callers to locate birds can result in unintended negative consequences to the species attracted through the use of these tools. In some cases, the modest use of playback calling is an acceptable way of locating a bird.

At other times, it is very risky and exposes a bird to harm by calling it out from a hiding place or causing other problematic changes in behavior.

A 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey of wildlife-associated recreation activities estimated there were nearly 48 million birders 16 years of age and older in the United States.

With this many birders, it becomes more important than ever to pursue this activity ethically and with bird conservation in mind. The United Kingdom's Birdwatcher's Code states it eloquently: *Avoid disturbing birds and their habitats — the birds' interests should always come first.*

The recent explosion in affordable technology has made it easier to overlook the birds' interests. Some birders' relentless pursuit of the Northern Spotted Owl is one such example of the harm that may come from the use of modern technology. The Northern Spotted Owl was listed under the Endangered Species Act as Threatened in 1990.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the spotted owl primarily due to threats stemming from the loss

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Ethical Considerations and Pointers When Using Playback

By David Sibley

With the recent surge in the availability of digital audio devices, the use of playback to attract birds into view has increased exponentially. This has fueled an ongoing debate among birders about the ethical issues surrounding the use of recorded bird songs in the field.



Editor's note: The two articles reprinted here from Issue No. 133 of WOSNews have been edited for length.

There is no debate that playback (playing a recording of a bird's song) is one of the most powerful tools in a birder's struggle to see birds in the wild. Birds that might otherwise be too shy to come into the open can be lured into view by the sound of a potential rival.

Birding disturbs birds. Everything that we do has an impact on birds. A total ban on playback (as some advocate) should equally include a total ban on pishing and mimicking bird calls. In some situations

playback can be less disruptive than other methods of attracting birds, at times even less disruptive than sitting quietly and waiting for a bird to show.

Most of the debate about playback has focused on a polarizing question: Is playback ethical, or not? With no concrete evidence supporting either side it remains unresolved. In this post I assume that it *will* be used, and that it is just one of many birding activities that should be practiced with sensitivity. Below I focus on suggesting some best practices to allow birders to enjoy the birds while minimizing the impact of playback on birds and on other birders.

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Spotted Owls and Playback Ethics (cont.)

of suitable habitat through timber harvest, but other factors included additional habitat loss from wildfire and competition from other species, especially the Barred Owl.

Despite its listing and the additional protections it has been afforded, the Northern Spotted Owl continues to display a range-wide population decline. Now that the range of the Barred Owl completely overlaps that of the Northern Spotted Owl, the degree of competition for food, habitat, and space has never been greater. Disturbances caused by human presence and noise can add to the stress caused by habitat removal and competition.

There is a growing consensus among owl biologists that Barred Owls are pushing spotted owls out of their territories and may also be causing a reduction in spotted owl vocalization.

Birders who use playback to incite spotted owls to call may be inadvertently putting spotted owls at risk by causing them to vocalize when they would normally be trying to stay “under the radar.” Human presence near nest sites also causes spotted owls to vocalize more frequently. Barred Owls (as well as goshawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and Great Horned Owls) have been observed attacking spotted owls on a number of occasions.

Being near an active nest site or using playback to incite spotted owls to call is likely to increase the odds that spotted owls will be killed or driven from their territories. While the risk of an attack on a spotted owl may be low, it is not zero, and it is literally a matter of life and death. Exposing a spotted owl to predatory attack is the most serious consequence posed by unethical birding, but other negative effects can occur: An owl that spends time looking for the perceived owl (playback) in its territory does not spend that time foraging for itself and for its young. The energetic cost of needlessly defending a territory may be a higher price than the owl or its chicks can pay. Playing calls within a territory may make an owl think the territory is already occupied, and the owl may needlessly move on to seek a

vacant territory. Vacant territories are increasingly hard to find in a landscape overrun by Barred Owls.

Unattended chicks in the nest are potential prey not only to the raptors listed above, but to corvids as well. All of these impacts added together (and repeated if multiple uninformed birders visit the same site during the year) may lead to nesting failure, site abandonment, or death of spotted owls. *A Birder's Guide to Washington*, published in 2003, included detailed directions to many known spotted owl sites. At least two of these nest sites near Cle Elum, WA, have become vacant or only sporadically occupied by single owls since this book was published – possibly due to the dramatic increase in birder visits. Calling for spotted owls without a permit is not only unethical, it is also illegal.

It is a violation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and can be considered “take,” which can lead to fines and jail time. Causing a spotted owl to leave shelter and fixate on you while you observe and possibly spotlight it, significantly disrupts its normal behavior, a form of “take” through “harassment.”

All birders should be familiar with the American Birding Association's Code of Birding Ethics, which states up front: 1(b) *To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger ... limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.*

Part of the joy of birding should be the development of your fieldcraft while giving fair chase to your quarry, not relying on a crutch like playback to lure birds into easy view. Birding should be as much about the methods used as it is about the numbers, and your county or life list is all the more impressive when acquired skillfully

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Spotted Owls and Playback Ethics (cont.)

and ethically. Locations of ESA-listed species should never be posted on websites such as eBird, Tweepers, or similar e-bulletin boards. Principled birders have no way of knowing who will read their posts, and what methods the next person may use to attempt to locate the bird. The spotted owl is but one example of why using call playback is not an ethically or environmentally responsible means of attracting sensitive species for viewing.

Playback Ethics and Pointers (cont.)

Summary

First, it is important to point out that the use of playback is prohibited in many parks and refuges. It is also illegal to disturb any endangered or threatened species (and playback can be interpreted as disturbance). Any potential negative impacts of playback are more likely to occur in areas with a lot of birding pressure, so avoiding playback entirely in those places is a good idea. Where and how to use it in other situations is up to the individual birder.

To be most effective and to minimize disturbance to the birds:

Have a plan – choose your spot and know your quarry, don't just play sounds; play snippets of sound – less than 30 seconds at a time, then a long pause before the next snippet (more silence than playback) and after five minutes or so give it a rest (but stay alert); be subtle – you are trying to tease the bird into the open, not stir up a fight.

To minimize disturbance to other birders:

No surprises. Announce your intention to play a recording, and hold the device above your shoulder while it plays, to avoid any confusion or false alarms; Keep the volume low, and use only occasional snippets of sound. Do not broadcast loud or continuous sound.

How does it work? Playback works best on territorial species during their nesting season, when the real bird thinks the recording is a rival threatening to encroach on either its territory or its mate. The territorial male will then (ideally) come out to confront the intruder by patrolling the edge of its territory and singing, or it may stay silent and close to its mate to guard against an adulterer. For her part, sometimes the female will approach the recording to assess the “new guy” and may even solicit some attention. Playback will arouse the curiosity of any species at any time of year, but the response is most dramatic from a territorial bird in breeding season, and weakest from non-territorial birds such as migrants.

Playing a recording from a roadside so that twenty people can see a bird might be better for the bird than having those twenty people walking or sitting for a long period in that habitat

The debate

Arguments in favor of playback: These are speculative and/or subjective. We are bird-watchers, and watching birds almost always involves some form of disturbance. Birding disturbs birds, and there are times when playback might

offer a less disruptive way of seeing a bird: Playback reduces the need to physically enter the bird's habitat, and therefore (presumably) reduces damage to the habitat and disturbance to the birds.

For example, playing a recording from a roadside so that twenty people can see a bird might be better for

Continued on next page

Playback Ethics and Pointers (cont.)

the bird than having those twenty people walking or sitting for a long period in that habitat; playback targets a single species, without disturbing other species, which is presumably better than physically walking through a bird's territory, or using broad-spectrum attractants like pishing, which affect all species.

It's possible that in some circumstances playback may increase the social standing of a male bird among its peers (see Research below); playback allows people to enjoy birds more fully (in this way it is analogous to bird feeding). It attracts birds into view that would otherwise be difficult to see well.

Arguments against playback: Most of these arguments are speculative; only the first one listed is documented by research on one species, and the last three are aesthetic impacts on other birders.

Aggressive playback (with the real bird coming away as the "loser") in at least one species can cause a male bird to lose status with rivals and its mate, leading the female to seek extra-pair copulations (see Research below).

Playback causes unnatural stress on the bird – the territorial male wastes energy chasing a phantom intruder; playback lures birds into the open, exposing them to predators; playback distracts birds from other more useful activities, such as foraging; birders dislike hearing an electronic recording, as it detracts from the "natural" experience of birding; birders experience increased stress from confusion and false alarms when the song of a sought-after species turns out to be a recording; playback is "cheating" and will create lazy birders who fail to develop good field skills.

Research

No research has demonstrated a negative impact of playback on birds at the population level. One study has found an impact on the status of individual males (see next paragraph). That doesn't mean the practice is benign, it just means that no negative effects have

ever been

documented. Effects that have been documented include raised testosterone levels in males, and increased maternal behavior (nest-building, etc.) in females exposed to playback. These observed effects could have either negative or positive outcomes.

When song is played in a bird's territory, that bird's response to the "intruder" is watched attentively by neighboring males and by females. In one study (Mennill et. al. 2002) high-ranking male Black-capped Chickadees exposed to aggressive playback lost status as their

mates and neighbors apparently perceived them as losers, unable to drive away the phantom intruder. This led to a loss of fitness as their mate went to other males to seek extra-pair copulations. That study found no change in the status of low-ranking males, and no reduction in the overall fledging rate of the nests in the area, just a change in the parentage of some offspring. To speculate, this study suggests another possibility, that males exposed to infrequent playback could potentially gain status when they "win" the confrontation and drive away the phantom intruder.

It is important to stress that this is a single study of a single species, and the results (if typical) may not be applicable to other species. Researchers generally agree that the effects of playback are poorly known but are probably (paradoxically) both far-reaching and small.

In contrast, research on Black-capped Vireos found that portable stereo systems broadcasting vireo songs at maximum volume for over six hours a day throughout the breeding season actually attracted vireos to previously unoccupied suitable habitat in Texas. The vireos apparently treated the recordings "as if they were birds with very small territories" (Ward and Sclossberg, 2004). Early in the season, males countersang with the recordings, but as the breeding season progressed they responded less and less, just as other species are known to habituate to

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Playback Ethics and Pointers (cont.)

the songs of established neighbors. These nesting pairs, subjected to loud playback for hours each day, established and retained their territories and had very high fledging success from their nests (Schlossberg and Ward, 2004).

What *Not* to do

Under no circumstances should you play a recording continuously or at very high volume. The epitome of bad playback etiquette is the birder who walks around with a device continuously and loudly broadcasting sound, or the photographer who sets up a device on continuous playback and waits for the bird to fly in. This is ineffective, unnecessary, and is the kind of playback most likely to be harmful to birds and disturbing to other birders.

A note on volume: I have found that the built-in speaker on the iPhone 3G is adequate for every playback situation I have tried, even though it is not as loud as an actual bird. If you are using a device with a built-in speaker, there is probably no need for an added, powered speaker.

Whatever device you are using, your starting volume should be lower than the sound you imagine the bird would produce.

Respect for the birds

To be really effective, playback requires just as much care and “fieldcraft” as any other birding technique. You need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the habits and behavior of the bird you are trying to lure. Plan carefully and understand your quarry so that you can guess where the bird is, or where it is likely to be. If you have already heard it or seen it, consider those locations when deciding where to play audio. You must be in (or very near) the bird’s territory to get a useful response.

Choose your spot and set the stage – Visualize the scenario of the bird coming into view. How will it approach the recording, and where will it sit so that

you can see it? You should play the recording from a location that offers the bird a comfortable approach through its preferred habitat, and also has openings, edges, and/or prominent perches where it will come into view.

Many playback efforts are unsuccessful either because the bird will not cross unsuitable habitat, or because dense vegetation allows it to approach closely while remaining hidden.

Begin by playing the recording quietly for just a few seconds – for example, just two or three songs, then stop, watch, and listen. Use short snippets – If there is any response, try very short snippets of song after that, even stopping the recording after half of a normal song, to try to tease the bird into the open without posing a serious challenge to its self-esteem.

Watch for a response – If there is no obvious response after 30-60 seconds, play another 15-30 seconds of sound. Remember that the bird may respond by approaching silently, or by guarding its mate, so a lack of song is not necessarily a lack of response, and you can assume that you are being watched. Watch the vegetation carefully on all sides for an approach, and also watch and listen for a response from neighboring males.

Remain calm – If you still don’t detect any response, play the recording again, watch and wait, and repeat. But don’t keep this up longer than about five minutes, and resist the urge to finish with a prolonged, loud barrage of song.

Check back later – Many birds will remain silent in the immediate aftermath of the playback, and then begin singing vigorously minutes later. Males in other territories might monitor the playback and the challenge to their neighbor, and also be stimulated to sing minutes later. If you can wait around, or circle back to check on the area after 10 to 30 minutes, you may find that the desired response to playback is

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Playback Ethics and Pointers (cont.)

occurring then.

Respect for fellow birders

Be courteous – Before starting, ask your fellow birders if anyone objects to using playback.

Don't surprise people – Before each burst of playback, announce to the group that you are about to start playback (just quietly saying “playback” will do), and hold the device up above your head during playback so other birders can see at a glance the source of the sound.

Be unobtrusive: Keep the volume low and play only short clips of sound – 30 seconds or less – then pause to watch and listen for a response.

In conclusion

With playback, you are effectively teasing a bird into the open, just like trying to get a fish to bite a lure. If a fish makes a pass at your lure on one cast, you wouldn't switch to a bigger, more colorful lure and throw it right on top of the fish over and over. No – you would use the same lure, cast it carefully and gently beyond the fish, and retrieve it with as much finesse as you can muster. In the same way, if you are trying to attract a bird into the open and it shows some interest in what you are doing, your next move should be the same thing again but lighter, with more finesse, trying to pique the bird's curiosity.

It is up to all of us to encourage our fellow birders to behave responsibly in the field. Field trip leaders who use playback should make an effort to educate their clients about the proper use of playback. If trip participants want their leader to use less or more playback, they should have a calm and reasoned discussion about it. In many cases we will need to educate new birders about the impact they have by playing recordings from the app they just downloaded to their phone. In the face of all this, it is understandable that heavily-visited parks and refuges often choose the easily-enforceable solution of a total ban on playback, and that should be respected.

As in all things related to birds, there is a lot that is unknown about their response to playback. More research on the effects of playback, including varied species with different social systems, would be very helpful. In the meantime, being courteous and respectful to the birds and to fellow birders should avoid most of the potential conflicts.

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